

**REMARKS**

By this amendment, claims 1-13 are pending, in which no claims are canceled, withdrawn from consideration, or newly presented. Claims 1 and 10 are currently amended and claims 6-9 have been indicated as allowable by the Examiner. No new matter is introduced.

The Office Action mailed June 18, 2007 rejected claims 1, 4, 5, 10, 12, and 13 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(a) as anticipated by *Matuschczyk et al.* (US 6,932,888)<sup>1</sup>, claims 1, 2, 4, 5, and 10-13 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as anticipated by *Sakuma et al.* (US 2002/0028317), and claims 1-5 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as anticipated by *Hikida* (US 2005/0145360).<sup>2</sup>

Applicant gratefully acknowledges the allowance of claims 6-9.

Independent claim 1 has now been amended to recite that “**both** an **inner** and an **outer diameter** of the elastic sleeve are gradually reduced from both ends to a center in an axial direction.” Also, independent claim 10, as amended, recites “said elastic sleeve has **both** an **inner** and an **outer diameter** gradually reduced from both ends to a center in an axial direction.”

By contrast, *Matuschczyk et al.* designs the inner circumferential surface of the press cover end region to be slightly conical, with an internal diameter that decreases from the outside toward the inside for ease of inserting a mounting ring. The conical configuration of the inner surface is formed **only** at the end region of the press cover. Since the **entire** region of the sleeve of the present claimed invention has a configuration with **inner** and **outer diameters** being **gradually reduced from both ends to a center in an axial direction**, features not taught by *Matuschczyk et al.*, present claims 1, 4, 5, 10, 12, and 13, as amended, cannot be anticipated by *Matuschczyk et al.*

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<sup>1</sup> The Examiner actually relies on the German counterpart of this reference, DE 101-38-526, but uses the U.S. Patent version as an English translation.

<sup>2</sup> The Examiner actually relies WO 03/085196 counterpart of this reference, but uses the U.S. Patent version as an English translation.

Similarly, *Sakuma et al.* cannot anticipate present claims 1, 2, 4, 5, and 10-13 because *Sakuma et al.* discloses a conical configuration formed **only** at the end region of the belt.

With regard to *Hikida*, this reference discloses a press belt with a thickness that is reduced from the center towards both ends. In Fig. 2, an inner diameter of the press belt is gradually reduced from both ends to the center in an axial direction, but there is no disclosure of the gradual reduction from both ends to the center in an axial direction, of **both** an inner diameter **and an outer diameter** of the press belt, as now required by amended claim 1. Instead, in *Hikida*, the press belt in Fig. 2, for example, shows an outer diameter increased from both ends to a center in an axial direction.

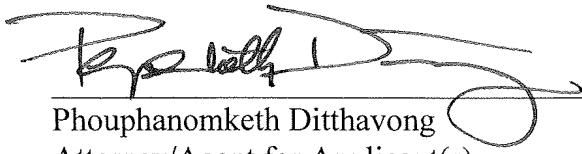
Accordingly, the Examiner is respectfully requested to withdraw the rejections of the claims under 35 U.S.C. § 102.

Therefore, the present application, as amended, overcomes the rejections of record and is in condition for allowance. Favorable consideration is respectfully requested. If any unresolved issues remain, it is respectfully requested that the Examiner telephone the undersigned attorney at (703) 519-9952 so that such issues may be resolved as expeditiously as possible.

Respectfully Submitted,

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